



Commonwealth of Kentucky

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Agencies Encourage Citizens to Avoid Asbestos Risks During Clean-up of Storm Debris

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 29, 2012) – The Kentucky Department for Public Health and the Division for Air Quality are recommending that homeowners, private citizens, commercial contractors, and county/city officials follow precautions to reduce the risk of exposure when cleaning up debris and damage after recent tornados. Because of the age of some of the destroyed buildings and mixture of debris, it is possible that debris may be contaminated with asbestos. Debris from damaged buildings should be kept wet and never burned, so that the potential release of dangerous asbestos particles into the air can be prevented.

Improper handling of asbestos-containing materials can lead to health problems. Asbestos is a mineral fiber that is commonly found in a variety of building construction materials such as roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, pipe insulation, and flame-retardant products like asbestos cement. When asbestos-containing materials are damaged or disturbed, microscopic fibers become airborne and can be inhaled into the lungs, where they can potentially cause harm.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends keeping asbestos-containing debris thoroughly wetted to reduce potential dust that might result during clean-up. In order to protect the health of homeowners and others involved in debris removal after the recent tornados, the Department for Public Health and the Division for Air Quality encourage the hosing of all demolition debris with water to keep it thoroughly wet until proper disposal in a landfill. Debris should be covered with protection before transportation to a landfill. Burning can potentially cause the release of toxic substances, including asbestos. Open burning of demolition debris is both dangerous and illegal. In addition to following these steps, the public is reminded to avoid contact with blowing dust from clean-up sites. While dust masks are helpful in filtering out some small particles, they may not be effective in protecting against exposure to fine asbestos particles.

Detailed information may be obtained at the Division for Air Quality's Web site at <http://air.ky.gov/Pages/default.aspx> and clicking on "Storm Debris Fact Sheet" at the bottom of the page.

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